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Housekeepers' Chats

Friday, January 24, 1931

(NOT FOR PUBLICATION)

Subject: "The Housekeeper's Desk." Information approved by the Bureau of Home Economics, U. S. D. A.

One evening last week when I was spending a comfortable hour reading by my sister Matilda's fireside, I came upon a letter in one of the women's magazines written to the editor by a husband. In it, he said, "Let's make a stronger issue of the business side of a wife's home duties. Is not the business of the home the most important of all businesses? And is not home management a real, actual, honest-to-goodness businesslike proposition?"

These three sentences I read aloud to Matilda who nodded, and said.

"Of course, this idea of the housekeeper as a business manager is not so new, but it does me good to see that husbands are beginning to think favorably of it. The need for system, efficient equipment and cooperation to make the home run smoothly and economically has never occurred to some men I know. As a result their wives struggle along in a haphazard manner and the old adage comes true. Men's work is over at sunset but women's work is never done. Efficiency in the business world means schedules, plans and budgets that work, well-equipped factories and laboratories, and offices with orderly desks and carefully arranged files."

Matilda described an office that she had seen that very afternoon, where everything had looked so spick and span and cheerful and where the work seemed to move along without a hitch.

"Housekeepers might be ten times more efficient if they would adapt business men's methods to their home jobs. Take desks for example. No telling how much time they might save themselves if they had orderly desks and kept their papers in files."

"That is an idea," exclaimed Matilda. "Do you remember my elderly desk upstairs in the front hall. I shall reform it. It has always been shamefully neglected--that desk. Yet if the business of the home is the most important of all businesses, as the writer of this letter suggests, why not an efficient desk for the home manager?"

Matilda's desk, she told me, had been put upstairs because there was a vacant looking space in the hall that seemed to demand some substantial piece of furniture. The light was not good up there so she had never enjoyed sitting at the desk. Eventually, therefore, it came to be used chiefly as a catch-all instead of a neat and helpful working center. Beside the pencils, pens, ink and



writing paper, that all proper desks should have, it was burdened with a mass of receipts, bills, clippings of all kinds, letters to be answered, bulletins, pamphlets, magazines and anything else that she wanted to save.

"A jumble, that's what my desk is," she said. "No order about it. Every now and then I need something in it, and then I have to spend valuable time searching all through that collection for one article. Afterward I always resolve to straighten it up once and for all, but you know how time goes and how odd jobs are allowed to wait. One of the chief troubles, when I do manage to get at the desk, is that there never seem to be places to put things. Thanks to you, however, I think I have a plan that will solve matters."

Where do you suppose I found Matilda's desk when I went over yesterday? In her kitchen! I will say that it looked very nice there, in the corner by the window. Her kitchen is large so she had plenty of room for it. As the desk was old, she had painted it yellow to harmonize with the color scheme of the room.

"This is a new idea to me," I told her. "I've never thought of the kitchen as the place for a desk."

She explained that Jonathan had suggested it. "When he came up to help me move the desk, he asked where it was to go. I explained that, as it was to be an aid to my efficiency, it must be near the scene of my activities so that I wouldn't have to waste time and effort running back and forth to it. I also said that I wanted it near a window where I could have plenty of daylight coming in at my left as I worked."

"Why not have it in the kitchen?" Jonathan had asked. "The kitchen is the room where you spend more hours of the day than anywhere else in the house. Think how handy it would be to have all your files of recipes, your cook books and household accounts, as well as all those government bulletins you use so much, centered right there at your kitchen desk."

No one would ever have guessed to look at that attractive and business-like desk that it could ever have been a neglected piece of furniture used chiefly as a catch-all. Across the top was a most colorful row of what looked like books in gay bindings. But these proved to be pamphlet holders of cardboard made like hollow book bindings and on sale, so Matilda told me, for a small amount in store selling paper or office supplies. Matilda had covered these with bright patterned paper, labeled each as to contents, and shellacked the the cover to help it withstand the wear and tear of kitchen life. So the holder had become both useful and decorative.

Then there were the drawers, all arranged for efficiency. The top drawer held card files of recipes, addresses and so forth. Another drawer held bills, receipts and checks arranged in clearly labelled folders. Clippings and larger papers were filed alphabetically in the bottom drawer.



"And this little lamp," Matilda added, "was a present from Jonathan, who assured me in his humorous way, that adequate light by day and by night, aids both efficiency and eyesight." When we become very prosperous, perhaps I can persuade Jonathan to have a telephone extension for this desk and a radio beside it so that I can sit here while taking down Aunt Sammy's menus and recipes."

Our dinner today features beef loaf for the main course, beef loaf served with tomato sauce or, if you prefer, tomato catsup. Shall I read it? It is an inexpensive dinner, by the way, with chocolate pie at the end for all those who, like my friend Georgine, in Oregon, have a passion for chocolate pie. Here is the menu: Beef loaf served with hot tomato sauce or tomato catsup; Scalloped potatoes; Buttered yellow turnips; Jellied vegetable salad; and for dessert, Chocolate pie.

I want to read you this recipe for beef loaf, because I know you will want to have it for your files, or your scrap books. There are eleven ingredients. I will read them over slowly:

2 pounds lean beef	1 cup chopped parsley
1 cup diced salt pork	1/4 cup chopped onion
4 tablespoons flour	1 cup fine, dry bread crumbs
1-1/2 cups milk	2 teaspoons salt
1 cup chopped celery	1/8 teaspoon pepper
4 or 5 dashes tabasco sauce	

Did you get all that? Perhaps I'd better say those over once more. (Repeat)

Put the meat through a grinder. Fry the diced salt pork until light brown and crisp and remove the pieces from the pan. Make a sauce of the flour, milk, and 3 tablespoons of the pork drippings. Cook the celery, parsley, and onion for a few minutes in the rest of the pork drippings, and add to this the bread crumbs and seasonings. Combine all the ingredients and use the hands to mix thoroughly. The mixture will have a sticky consistency. Lay a piece of parchment paper on a rack in an open roasting pan. Mold the meat loaf on the paper with the hands. Bake the loaf in a moderate oven (350° F.) for 1-1/4 hours. Do not cover the pan and do not add water. Much better results are obtained by making the meat loaf in this way than by packing it into a deep pan and baking it like a loaf of bread. Remove the meat loaf from the paper and serve hot, or chill it and serve in thin slices with watercress garnish.

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